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A few years ago, I led the development of a NASA program which studies the origin, evolution, and distribution of life on many different scales. Now, it's my job to make connections between individual organisms (plants and animals), planets, and the universe, using various different technologies to explore them. I lead and manage spacecraft research related to life in the universe and try to come up with strategies to make new discoveries.

Areas of expertise:

- Astrobiology

How I first became interested in this profession:

When I was five years old, the first communication satellites, Telstar and Sputnik, were launched. My father and I would go and look for them. When we finally saw them, I was so excited! I remember asking, "What's that?" And my father said, "It's the world changing."

What helped prepare me for this job:

Being interested in a lot of things has helped me a lot. My original study in college was theater arts, which helped prepare me for astrobiology because many things have to come together in a production just like things have to come together in the study of life in the universe. Working on projects also helped me because they gave me experience.

My role models or inspirations:

I've been inspired by my family, because they love learning. They've taught me not to be afraid to be bad at something, because success comes later. I've also had many good teachers and mentors as well as science fiction inspirations like the cast of Star Trek.

My education and training:

- B.A. in Biology, University of Bridgeport
- M.A. in Cell Biology, University of Bridgeport

My career path:

- Program Manager of Advanced Missions and Special Projects at NASA Ames for four years.
- Chief of the Advanced Life Support Division at NASA Ames for four years.
- Astrobiologist at NASA Ames for one year
- Lead, Integrative Studies, Astrobiology and Space Research Directorate at NASA Ames for one and a half years.

What I like about my job:

I like the adventure of discovery and the sheer beauty of things in space, and of living things. I also love working with terrific people. It makes the job interesting when I get to work with great scientists and great human beings.

What I don't like about my job:

I'm not wild about the paperwork. I do more than I'd like.

My advice to anyone interested in this occupation:

Find three things that you really like to do and take the time to get as good at them as you can. Pursue those as your career. If you'd like to be an astrobiologist in particular, learn a science, a technology, and lots of computer skills. Also, develop a love of learning.